

FREE ADDRESS

TO

Protestant Dissenters,

A S S U C H.

By a DISSENTER.

W. Priestley.

*After the manner which they call heresy, so worship I
the God of my fathers.*

PAUL.

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THE
PREFACE
TO THE
SECOND EDITION

OF THE
HISTORY OF THE
UNITED STATES

THE PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION OF THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES, AS PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHOR, IN THE YEAR 1805, IS HEREBY REPRINTED, AS A SUPPLEMENT TO THE FIRST EDITION, IN ORDER TO CORRECT THE MISTAKES WHICH HAVE BEEN POINTED OUT BY THE PUBLIC, AND TO ADD SUCH MATTERS AS WERE NOT INCLUDED IN THE FIRST EDITION, BUT WHICH ARE NOW CONSIDERED AS NECESSARY TO THE COMPLETION OF THE HISTORY. THE AUTHOR HAS BEEN ASSISTED BY THE FOLLOWING GENTLEMEN, WHOSE NAMES ARE HEREIN MENTIONED, IN THE REVISION AND CORRECTION OF THE MANUSCRIPT:—

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T H E

P R E F A C E.

TH E present situation of the dissenting interest makes any apology for this address superfluous. If the author be blamed for reflecting on the church of England, when he can plead no particular provocation for it; let it be considered, that this has been done only *indirectly*, and when his subject unavoidably led to it. As the address is directed to *dissenters* only; the members of the established church have no business with it; and if they never look into what is not addressed to them, or intended for their inspection, no offence can be taken. If notwithstanding this, they cannot resist a curiosity to pry into the concerns of their neighbours, themselves only are answerable for the consequences, not the author.

If, in this case, they do not find this performance to be written in the tame and humble stile of an *apologist*, they should consider that

the writer does not think there is any thing in the principles or practices of the dissenters, so palpably open to objection, as to require an apology. The things that seem to want an apology are the doctrines of original sin, predestination, trinity in unity, satisfaction by vicarious punishments, &c. a hierarchy, consisting of persons with names and powers altogether unknown in the New Testament; ecclesiastical persons, as such, invested with civil power, contrary to the very genius of the religion of Jesus Christ, whose kingdom was not of this world; subscriptions to creeds and articles of faith of human composition; the imposition of ceremonies by the authority of men, in a church, of which Christ alone is the head; and the enjoining of rites, which are the remains and badges of popish superstition; such as the wearing of a surplice, the sign of the cross, with god-fathers and god-mothers, in baptism; confirmation by the imposition of the hands of a bishop; wheeling about to the east, and bowing at the name of *Jesus*, as if it was a mere sound that was worshipped; the posture of kneeling at the lord's supper, as it were, in adoration of the elements of bread and wine, &c. &c. &c. Such as these are the things that look as if they wanted some *apology*; for

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for, certainly, their reasonableness is far from being evident at first sight.

If it be asked, why the author chose to conceal his name, he frankly acknowledges, that it was not because he was apprehensive of making himself obnoxious to the members of the church of England. If they understand him right, they will perceive that his intentions towards them are far from being unfriendly; and if they understand him wrong, and put an unfair and uncandid construction upon what he has written; he trusts that, with a good meaning, and in a good cause, he will never be over-awed by the fear of any thing that men may *think* of him, or *do* to him. Neither was it because he was apprehensive of giving offence, either to the *ministers*, or to the *people* among the dissenters; because he has spoken with equal freedom to both; but, in reality, because he was unwilling to lessen the weight of his observations and advice, by any reflections that might be made on the person from whom they come. An anonymous author is like the abstract idea of a man, which may be conceived to be as perfect as the imagination of the reader can make it.

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If, however, notwithstanding all the author's precautions, any of his readers should find him out; he hopes that, along with so much sagacity, they will at least have the goodness to forgive what was well intended, and excuse imperfections in one who is at least desirous to render others free from them.

If any person who is not a dissenter should take it into his head, that by reading this address, he will become possessed of a great secret, and be acquainted with the real sentiments and views of the dissenters, as a body, he will miserably deceive himself. Dissenters as such have nothing in common but a dissent from the established church; and it by no means follows that they, therefore, agree in any thing else. The majority of the dissenters will be more offended at this performance than any member of the church of England; and even that part of the dissenters to whom it is more particularly addressed will be far from being universally pleased with it. The author is a single person, who writes without the concurrence of any other person whatever, and is therefore answerable only for his own private sentiments and conduct.

If it be said that this book was written purposely to gain converts from the church of England, though in an indirect manner, the author can only reply by saying, that he really had no such views or expectations. At the same time, he would have no objection to acknowledge it, if that had been either a primary, or a secondary view in this publication. It is certainly no crime in a man to write in defence of what he thinks to be a good cause, or to endeavour to gain converts to it from what he thinks to be a bad one. He, no doubt, like all mankind, sincerely wishes that other persons would enter into his views, and adopt his sentiments; but having no *dragons* to employ for this purpose, and no *acts of parliament* to second him, he must be content to do what he can by the help of reason and argument alone; and these spiritual weapons, are by no means so certain in their effects on the *minds*, as carnal weapons are on the *bodies* of men; so that no person need be apprehensive, especially in this age, in which riches, fashion, and power have such influence, of any great execution being done, or any great changes being brought about by *books* only which few read, and fewer regard.

Though this address was certainly written with a serious desire to make dissenters think, and act in a manner worthy their profession; it is not, however, any part of the author's intention to revive the spirit of a party, except, primarily, so far as the party has religion, that is the interests of its members in another world, for its object; and, secondarily, so far as the interest of this particular party, in *civil matters*, is the interest of the whole society, of which they are members, having for its object the cause of liberty, and all the valuable rights of Englishmen. The author of this work is not much concerned about the *civil privileges* of the dissenters as such, and as a separate body in the state; but he most earnestly wishes that their liberal and generous views, with respect to civil and religious liberty, may be so fully imbibed by themselves, and so far diffused among others, as that all their countrymen, without excepting their most violent enemies, may reap the benefit of them. This performance is certainly intended to make one particular part of the commonwealth more respectable; but this part is of such a nature, that the author conceives that the necessary consequence of their being more respectable would be a great increase of glory to his

his country at large, from which that part would derive no particular advantage, except the honour of having contributed to it.

If the author appear to wish for a farther reformation in the established church, it is with no interested views, derived from his expectation of a comprehension of the dissenters in it. Were he himself permitted to new model the ecclesiastical establishment of his country, he would do it according to his best judgment, and according to his present ideas of perfection in things of that nature; but he would not be a member of it himself so long as it was a *national establishment*; because he thinks it is more for the interest of christianity, that particular societies of christians should be as free and independent as private persons. He does not apprehend that any greater inconvenience would arise from unbounded liberty being given to every man to think and act for himself in all matters of religion, than there is found to arise from the same liberty with respect to medicine. It appears to him that individuals would provide better for themselves, in both these respects, than their civil governors ever have done, are disposed, or able to do for them.

To

To *dissenters* the author recommends a candid and serious attention to the subject of this address. He was very serious in writing it, and will rejoice exceedingly if it have any good effect on ever so few of the members of that body to which he belongs. Gladly would he contribute to render them in any degree more respectable as men, as Englishmen, and as christians; that, unfettered as they are by any laws, but those of *their one only master, even Christ*, they may exhibit a specimen of a truly christian temper and conduct, by joining the religious zeal of their ancestors to their own enlarged views, and liberal sentiments; things which are so far from being incompatible, that they have, naturally, the closest connection.

Earnestly does he wish that *ministers*, being free from the impositions of men, would apply with more assiduity to the faithful and chearful discharge of their proper duty, in enlightening the minds, and improving the hearts and the conduct of their hearers; setting them an example of unbounded confidence in divine providence, under the circumstances of a scanty and precarious provision, of a conscientious and fearless integrity in asserting the truth as it is in Jesus, of a generous contempt of the pleasures

fures and pains of this life, when they tend to lead men from the path of their duty; and, universally, of the prevailing influence of those considerations which are drawn from their character, as citizens of heaven, over those which result from their interest in this transitory world. Earnestly, also, does he wish that *the people* may be duly influenced by such examples, and instructions; that, though they are more engaged in the business and commerce of this world they may not lose sight of their relation to another.

May ministers and people jointly strengthen each others hands in the great work of reformation, and bear a noble testimony against all antichristian errors and superstition. Instead of being discouraged by the reproaches and hardships to which their profession exposes them, may they rather *rejoice that they are counted worthy to suffer shame* in so glorious a cause. By their peaceable and inoffensive behaviour may prove themselves worthy of the protection of the civil government, how much soever they may disapprove of the maxims, or the administration of it. May they excite the honest emulation of the members of the established church, and of christians of every other denomination, by their
zeal

zeal to promote all kinds of useful knowledge, by their attention to the advancement of the best interests of society, and by their exemplary care to understand their religion, and to live according to the rules of it; that, whatever treatment they may meet with in the world, they may secure the approbation of the great judge of hearts and actions, and, at least, *deserve well* of their country and of mankind.

A F R E E
A D D R E S S
T O
Protestant Dissenters,
A S S U C H.
By a D I S S E N T E R.

My Christian Brethren,

I AM a Protestant Dissenter, I glory in the name, and it is with a view to render you, in general, more sensible of its dignity, and importance, that I take the liberty to make this free address to you. Sorry I am, from a regard to the interests of truth and liberty, to see the zeal of many cool in so noble a cause, for which our heroic ancestors sacrificed so much; when the reasons for our dissent are far from having been lessened, in number or weight, in the interval between their times and ours, that, in proportion to the improvements in religious knowledge, these reasons have been

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greatly multiplied, and continue to grow in number and strength every day. Yet, paradoxical as it may appear, those of us, who have these growing reasons to be satisfied with this cause of truth and liberty, are generally less strongly attached to it, and more easily and frequently desert it, than those whose opinions are such, that they have less reason than ever to separate from the established church. It is to the former class of dissenters, therefore, that I would be understood to address myself in a more particular manner; and I beg nothing more, my brethren, than your candid attention, while I argue this matter with you, considering you both in *a religious*, and *a civil* capacity. I promise you I will take up as little of your time as I can help, and use as few words as possible, to make you fully sensible of what I have to propose to your consideration.

SECTION I.

IF I consider the subject of our dissent as a matter purely *religious*, I cannot help thinking it of the utmost importance, even to the cause of christianity in general. That gross corruptions have been introduced into this most excellent scheme of religion, corruptions which began very early, and have been confirmed by long continuance, corruptions which totally disfigure it, and defeat the principal ends of its institution, is a lamentable truth, universally acknowledged by protestants. If christianity itself, therefore, be of importance, it must be of importance to free it from these corruptions: for whether it be better for men to be christians at all, or to continue Papists, is very problematical, and a question which many sensible persons would not hesitate to determine in the negative; but to whom are we to look for the advancement of this necessary work of reformation from the errors and abuses of popery? I answer, without hesitation, it is to *dissenters* only, of whatever denomination, in every christian country.

Can it be supposed that the princes of this world, or *mere statesmen*, who are the persons that erect or model, according to their pleasure, all ecclesiastical establishments, will ever have this business at heart; or that, if they should undertake it, they are duly qualified for the conduct of it. It cannot be expected that religion should ever be a primary object with civil governors. They may make use of it as an engine of state policy, to promote their own secular ends; but, in general, they are too much *men of this world*, to concern themselves about a scheme, the great object of which is *a world to come*; and provided religion give them no great interruption in their plans of civil policy, it cannot be thought that they will ever voluntarily promote any reformation in it. Their interest is, generally, best answered by the quiet continuance of all things of this nature, which are foreign to their immediate province, in the condition in which they are, and have been, let that condition be ever so wretched; and they are ready to take the alarm at every thing that may hazard their tranquility, or create disturbance in the state: and reformation

tion in religion, especially when it has been violently attempted, and when corruptions and abuses (by means of the injudicious interposition of government) have been confirmed by long continuance, is known to have this tendency.

I seemed to lament that the princes of this world are not disposed to concern themselves about reformation in religion; but, indeed, it is rather a happiness that they are not; for all the service they can do to religion is not to intermeddle with it at all, so as to interrupt the reformation which might take place in it from natural and proper causes; and for this negative assistance the friends of religion would think themselves under the greatest obligation to civil government. Civil power is a very improper engine to be employed in work of this nature; and, whenever employed, can hardly fail to defeat its end. Wherever *opinion* is concerned; *force* of all kinds, and all motives of *interest* (both of which will ever accompany the civil magistrate) ought to be removed to the greatest distance; and spontaneous, disinterested, and calm reasoning, have the field en-

tirely to herself. Jesus Christ and his apostles asked no aid of the civil powers.

Non tali auxilio, nec defensoribus istis.

VIRGIL.

The kingdom of Christ is not represented by any part of the metalick image of king Nebuchadnezzar, which denoted all the empires of this world; but is the *little stone cut out of the mountain without hands*. It is a thing quite foreign to the image, and will at last fall upon it, and destroy all the remains of it. All that true christianity wishes, is to be unmolested by the kings and rulers of the earth, but can never submit to their regulations. No christian prince before the reformation ever interfered in the business of religion, without establishing the abuses which had crept into it; and all that christian princes have done since the reformation, has tended to retard that great work; and to them, and their interference, it is manifestly owing, that it is no farther advanced at this day.

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There needs to be no greater evidence of this, with respect to England, than a comparison between the reformation proposed by Wickliffe, so early as the year 1460, and the church of England as by law established, from the year 1559, in the reign of queen Elizabeth, to the present year 1769, and as it will probably continue so long as our civil and ecclesiastical governors shall be able to maintain it, in its present imperfect state, notwithstanding the increasing light of the age. Wickliffe admitted of no more than two degrees in the ministerial office, viz. *deacons*, and *presbyters*, or *bishops*. "These two," says he, "were known in Paul's time, and the others are the invention of impious pride." The church of England has *archbishops*, *bishops*, *archdeacons*, *deans*, *canons*, *prebendaries*, &c. &c. &c. Wickliffe says, that "civil government should not be committed to the clergy." We suffer the seat of all the bishops in the highest house of parliament, and give them power in ecclesiastical courts, in which they have cognizance of civil matters, and in which punishments are inflicted that affect the person, liberties, and fortunes of British subjects, though the pro-

ceedings are contrary to those which are in use in the civil courts, and repugnant to the free constitution of this government. Wickliffe would have abolished all ceremonies in religion not prescribed in the scriptures. He says, that "confirmation, giving orders, and the consecration of places, were reserved to the pope and the bishops for the sake of temporal gain and honour; that it is not lawful for a christian, after the full publication of the law of Christ, to devise, himself, any other laws for the government of the church;" and he condemns a set of prescribed forms of prayer, as derogatory from the liberty God had given them. How consonant, in every article, is all this to reason, christianity, and good sense; but how opposite to this, in every article, the maxims of the church of England, as by law established.

Had not our civil governors (among whom, let it be observed, I include the bishops, and all the members of the hierarchy) taken the alarm, and opposed the attempts of Wickliffe and his partizans, there is no doubt, but that a reformation would speedily have taken place upon his enlarged plan. And since, without the interference

terference of the civil magistrate, he himself could not have formed any other establishment, more light would have continued to be thrown upon religious subjects; and not only would the *discipline*, but the *doctrines* of the church, have been reformed more and more. Whereas, such have been the blessed effects of the interference of the civil magistrate in the religion of this country, that, instead of seeing things in this glorious train, all that has been effected hitherto, is a miserable compromise between popery, and the imperfect plan of reformation proposed by Wickliffe.

○ If the errors and abuses which Wickliffe discovered have not yet been reformed, how can we expect a reformation of errors which he never suspected, but which he retained, as the most sacred of all truths, and which he would have been shocked to have heard called in question. And yet, I have heard of no christian establishment in Europe, in which the grossest corruptions of the most fundamental doctrines of the gospel are not retained; corruptions which entirely pervert the whole scheme, and are so repugnant to our natural notions of God and virtue, that, so long as they are known to

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be maintained by christians in general, and considered as essential parts of the scheme of christianity, must necessarily prove an insuperable obstacle to its propagation in the world, and especially to the conversion of the Jews and Mohammedans. With them the belief of the *divine unity* is, and, indeed, justly, a fundamental article of faith. This is also the clear doctrine both of the Old and New Testament; but, not being the faith of christians in general, all christians are unavoidably considered by them as guilty of *polytheism* and *idolatry*. And who can acquit them of the charges, so long as they profess to pay divine honour to *three persons*, and address their most solemn prayers, not to *one God, the Father*, but to *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*? Many other corruptions might be mentioned in the same system with this, which, all together, make the whole system of modern christianity less like the christianity of the New Testament, than it is to the religion of the Brachmans of Indostan.

What I am saying is, perhaps, no news even to the generality of the members of the established church. Many of them feel, and lament the wretched state of things among them;
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and some of the clergy have, now and then, the courage to *propose* a reformation; but so long as the civil power continues to be the supreme head of this church, the first effectual motion must come from thence; and till there be some *state necessity* for setting about a reformation, the remonstrances of a thousand *candid disquisitors*, followed by as many *confessionalsists*, will signify but little.

This *state necessity*, which alone can make our civil governors think of a reformation, must arise from the difficulty of carrying on the business of our present *politico-ecclesiastical constitution* without it. And so long as the laity are content with their clergy, and their *statute duty*, and, as long as clergymen can be found, who are content to do this duty, and are satisfied with the *terms* on which they are required to do it, and without which they cannot receive the *reward* for doing it, it is very unlikely that the houses of parliament, who have business enough, of other kinds, upon their hands, will ever take this affair into consideration.

In order to engage their attention to this subject, therefore, both the clergy and the laity must *act*, as well as *think* and *write*. The laity must

must *dissent*, and quit those places of worship in which they are convinced that divine service is not conducted according to truly christian principles; and the clergy must throw up the preferments which they *received*, and which they, therefore, *hold* upon their solemnly declared assent to doctrines which they disbelieve, and their approbation of a ritual which they dislike. For should either of these two events happen (both of which, however, are, to the last degree, improbable) that the laity in general should be so far enlightened, as to see the errors of the established religion, and at the same time so strictly conscientious, as to think it their duty not to give any countenance to those corruptions of christianity by their presence at the service, and their concurrence in it; or should the generality of the clergy, for the same just reasons, relinquish their preferments, to teach a purer religion, without expecting their recompence from man; the king of England, and the two houses of parliament, would see it to be high time to attend to this subject, and a reformation of the greatest abuses, at least, would immediately take place.

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But my business is not with the *established church*. I thank God, the cause I am pleading is not quite so hopeless. I have not to do with fettered churchmen, but with *free dissenters*; and it is, confessedly, not so difficult to persuade men to continue as they are, as to engage them to change their situation.

While there are dissenters from civil establishments of religion; that is, while there are men who are not *bired*, nor lie under any temptation to prostitute their consciences in the support of falsehood, there will be freedom of inquiry, unchecked by the apprehension of consequences; freedom of inquiry will produce its natural offspring, truth; and truth has charms, that require only to be seen and known, in order to recommend itself to the acceptance of all mankind. Darkness and prejudice cannot always involve the minds of men; and if truth once begin to dawn upon them, it will be as the *morning light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day*.

Learn, then, my protestant dissenting brethren, to regard your situation with respect; when you consider, that among you alone, in this country, is the worship of the only living
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and true God known, and the purity of the christian doctrine and discipline exhibited. Errors, no doubt, and perhaps great ones too, still remain among the most enlightened of us, but we have no reason to be alarmed at the suspicion. We are at liberty to make the most rigid scrutiny into the foundation of our religious principles. We may instantly rectify what we find amiss, and may, without restraint, use our endeavours to enlighten the minds of others. We have subscribed to no systems, or articles of faith; and therefore have no formal recantation to make upon the occasion. We enjoy no emoluments in consequence of our assent to any religious opinions or practices; and, therefore, are under no temptation to equivocate with our consciences (which are apt to prove intractable, and are seldom perfectly easy under that kind of treatment) to avoid the disagreeable alternative of giving up a church living, when we are convinced that the doctrines we have subscribed to, upon our induction into it, are erroneous, and the discipline we have conformed to is inexpedient, or dangerous.

This last circumstance, I am sensible, chiefly affects *ministers*; but if you, gentlemen of the
laity

lalty among dissenters, think yourselves unconcerned in it, you are greatly mistaken. Being men of a liberal turn of mind in other respects, condemning no man for his religious opinions, and being fully satisfied that honest men, of all professions, cannot but stand well in the favour of thier maker, you are apt to pursue these just sentiments too far; and to think that, because there is no harm to *them* in their worship, there is no harm to *you* in it; so that by joining in what is good, and neglecting what is bad, you may, without the violation of your conscience, and without any inconvenience, join in a constant way with any sect of protestants whatever, in the celebration of divine worship. But consider, that, upon the very same principles, you might join with any sect of christians, and even join in the service of the mass in a constant way. Upon the same principles, also, you might neglect all the forms of christian worship, and join yourselves to the Jews, or the Mohammedans, for it cannot be denied, but that there is something good to be found among them, and this you might pretend to take, and neglect the rest.

In short, this specious principle, founded, in appearance, on generous sentiments of moderation

ration and candour, is a most fallacious and dangerous one. By the help of it the primitive christians might have joined the worship of the heathens, there needed to have been no martyrs in the christian church, and all *persecution for the cross of Christ* would have ceased. Many of the old Puritans, indeed, constantly attended divine worship in the church of England; but there were no other places of public worship open; and they thought it their duty to give their testimony in favour of religion and christianity in general, by joining in the best forms that they conveniently could. Besides, it should be considered, that the old puritans did not object to the doctrines of the church of England; or to forms of prayer, but only to ceremonies, and matters relating to discipline, nay, many of them had no great objection to the ceremonies in themselves, but only to the *imposition* of them, which they justly thought was owning a power, which Christ had not committed to man; but, my brethren, your objections now lie much deeper, and affect the very essentials of the established worship.

Do not say that I inherit the rigid scrupulosity of my ancestors. On the contrary, I think it
extreme

extreme bigotry never to indulge a liberal curiosity, so far as, in the character of a *spectator*, to see in what manner persons of other denominations conduct divine worship. I have frequently gone to church myself, and do not scruple to go sometimes still, though I am shocked at what I hear there; but, certainly, by joining *habitually* with any one denomination of christians, we declare our preference of it to any other, especially to any other that it would be as convenient for us to attend; and whatever errors and irregularities there are in that church, more than in any other, we, by our conduct, give our sanction to them, and, as far as our influence extends, recommend and enforce them.

If, therefore, you be a believer in the one true God, the Father, and, in other respects, maintain the purity of the gospel principles; you not only expose your own minds to perpetual disquiet and uneasiness, by habitually joining in the service of the established church; which is, throughout, founded on principles very different from yours; but christianity in general is offended at your conduct, as you virtually oppose all reformation, and contribute to

entail all its errors and abuses upon it. Indeed I cannot help thinking, that a man who is properly in earnest in religion, who considers of what importance genuine christianity is, and how exceedingly unlike to it is the whole system on which the English hierarchy is founded, must be staggered when he weighs these things in his own mind. Going to church in a constant way, is not going in the character of a spectator. If you are observed to be there constantly, you will be supposed to *prefer* that method of worship. You will, likewise, be supposed, not only to be *seeing* what is done there, but also to have something to *do* yourself. You are supposed to join in the prayers of the church; and, therefore, to pay divine worship to inferior and derived beings, as if they were the *true and very God*; which is certainly undisguised impiety and idolatry.

So unlike to genuine primitive christianity are all the ecclesiastical establishments in Europe, and so much in the spirit of this world are they conducted, that it is no wonder that persons who inquire but little, and judge of christianity by what they see, are, so many of them, unbelievers. By joining these corrupt establishments,

ments, therefore, you promote the cause of infidelity; whereas by joining with a society of christians, who profess the gospel in its original simplicity; or, at least, are in a situation in which you are at liberty to bring it to that simplicity, you bear your testimony against all the corruptions of this divine religion; you represent it in an amiable light to mankind; and, without speaking or writing in its defence, are advocates for the truth, and preachers of righteousness in the world.

If this be to be a dissenter, it is certainly a respectable and important character. Learn then, my brethren, to reverence your profession, and consider it as a thing that is as much superior to any ecclesiastical establishment, as a scheme which has an eternal world for its object, is superior to all schemes of worldly policy; as much superior to them, as Christ, whom alone you acknowledge to be your legislator, is superior to the princes and powers of this world, whom those who adhere to establishments acknowledge, as their legislators.

Dissenters in England are often confounded with the Presbyterians of the *kirk of Scotland*; and time was when those who go by the name

of *Presbyterians* in England entertained the same principles, and would have been glad, either to have united with them, or to have formed themselves upon the same, or a similar plan. Mr. Pierce dedicated his *Vindication of the Dissenters* to the pastors and ministers of the church of Scotland, calling them *Brethren*, and saying that the dissenters in England were united to them in the same *faith, worship, form of government, design, and brotherly love*. But divine providence happily prevented the execution of what our forefathers earnestly desired, and has brought the dissenters in England into a situation infinitely more favourable to the interests of truth and christianity, than they had any idea of themselves. We are, now, far from admitting that the members of the church of Scotland are any more our brethren, than the members of the church of England. A charge of any alliance with the Scotch presbyterians would now be considered as a calumny; and if we were disposed to conform to an establishment, we should not look so far North. The two establishments in the island differ in little more than matters of *discipline*, which we now think to be of little consequence, in comparison
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of those errors in *doctrine*, which lie at the very foundation of the christian scheme, errors in which they both agree, and which they both enforce with the same unrelenting rigour. And there is not much more prospect of things growing better in the one, than in the other.

The great advantage which the church of Scotland enjoys over the church of England, arose from this single, but important circumstance, that the former was prompted and conducted by the *people*, who had nothing but religion in view, and who carried their scheme as far as they thought proper; whereas the latter was conducted by the *civil magistrate*, who went no farther in the reformation than he could help, and modelled the government of the church, so as to make it subservient to the purposes of the state. Hence the Scotch ministers have all decent and moderate salaries, they have little or no civil power, and pluralities are unknown among them; while there remains a shameful inequality in the provision for the English ministers, some living in affluence in palaces, and adding one large benefice to another, while others of them are absolutely starving on miserable curacies; and, notwith-

standing an ample sufficiency in the revenues of the church, are obliged to depend upon the voluntary contributions of their parishioners, for a necessary support. Here, also, the bishops, along with the revenues of princes, have an extensive *jurisdiction*, and great civil power; and while the bishopricks, and, in a manner, all the great benefices are, directly or indirectly, at the disposal of the court, a ministry, be they ever so corrupt, can never want tools to assist them in carrying on their most iniquitous and oppressive schemes. Witness the slavish and absurd doctrines of *passive obedience* and *non-resistance*, so furiously inculcated by, I may say, the body of the English clergy, in the arbitrary and accursed reigns of the Stewarts,

SECTION II.

HAVING considered the importance of the dissenting interest with respect to *religion*, I shall now briefly treat of it as it respects *civil policy*. Mr. Hume acknowledges, that whatever civil liberty is now enjoyed in this country, is owing to our ancestors the Puritans, who were equally friends to civil and religious liberty. For my own part, I cannot say that I consider them as uniform and consistent friends to either; but their schemes being thwarted by the court, they were necessarily engaged in the opposite interest; and thus, from the mere force of oppression, without any greater enlargement of mind, or superior merit, they became the advocates for liberty. But still it was only liberty for themselves, and their own party, that they aimed at; and could they have carried their point, they would have exercised as severe a tyranny over the consciences of men as their antagonists. Were they now in power, I myself should expect to be one of the first victims to their bigotry and rage.

However, whatever were the views of the dissenters originally, tho' they were so extreme-

ly narrow and confined at first, they have been so long the weaker party, and consequently in an interest opposite to the views of tyranny and arbitrary power; that, at length, they have begun to understand their situation, and have found the true and just principles, on which the cause of *universal liberty* may be best supported. On these principles, my brethren, I trust you will always act, without troubling yourselves to make any apology for the maxims and conduct of our ancestors. If they were culpable, let them bear the censures they deserve, we must think, and act for ourselves.

So long as we continue dissenters, it is hardly possible that we should be other than friends to the civil liberty, and all the essential interests of our fellow citizens. The friends of this great cause may always depend upon us; but statesmen who have other views may justly be jealous of us, and they cannot give a clearer proof of their hostile intentions towards the liberty of their country, than by using us with rigour. Witness the severe persecutions we suffered in the arbitrary reigns of the Stewarts, the measures that were taking with us towards the close of the reign of queen Ann, and the indulgence

dulgence that has been shown us since the happy revolution, under king William of glorious memory.

In all this, we claim no particular merit. Dissenting ministers, being chosen by their people, will naturally enter into the views of their people, in civil as well as religious matters; and the dissenting laity, not being noblemen, or men of very large fortunes, and therefore having, in general, the same interest with the rest of their fellow subjects; dissenting ministers, as far as their influence in a political light is of any consequence, will naturally enter into the interest of the people at large. It is for the same reason that the established clergy may be supposed to favour the court, as it has the disposal of bishopricks and rich benefices. The maxim of *No bishop, no king*, might justly have had weight with wiser princes than our James the first.

It is also natural for the dissenters to wish well to every mild administration, which secures to them their privileges, and opposes the attempts of a bigotted and headstrong multitude, of clergy and laity, to oppress them. For the same reason, too, when the country, by its established laws, favours the interest of the dissenters, so
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that they have a *legal right* to their privileges, they naturally consider their country, and its laws, as their guardians, and will strenuously oppose all the encroachments of the prerogative on the laws and rights of the subjects in general. For they must be sensible, that the established laws of a free community must be a better security for their privileges, than the will of any single man whatever. They have too much at stake, to be willing to hold it on so precarious a tenure.

It also clearly follows, from the same principle of self-interest, independent of gratitude, that the more indulgence dissenters meet with from the government, the stronger will be their attachment to it. Tho', therefore, it should seem proper to the legislature to give a preference to one mode of religion, by a legal provision for the maintenance of its ministers, it is clearly for its interest to attach all dissenters to it as much as possible by a participation of *civil privileges*; and it is both injustice, and bad policy, in civil governors, to debar themselves from the service of men of ability and integrity, and, at the same time, to alienate their affections by such an *opprobrious exclusion* from civil honours.

nours. Yet, tho' I think it right that these things should be publickly said, that they may have weight with those whom it may concern, far would I be from encouraging the least tendency towards disaffection in the dissenters to the present constitution of England. Imperfect as it is, and hard as the present laws bear upon us dissenters in some respects, our situation in England is, upon the whole, such as we have great reason to be thankful to divine providence for, being abundantly more eligible than it would be in any other country in the world; and it is not so desirable to obtain even a just right by clamour and contention, as by the continuance of a prudent and peaceable behaviour. This may convince our legislators, that we are deserving of their indulgence. Men who harbour no resentment, tho' under a restraint, of the injustice and unreasonableness of which they are fully sensible, must be possessed of generosity enough to be capable of the most grateful and firm attachment to the hand that frees them from the restraint. If a man have magnanimity enough not to bear malice against an enemy, much more will he be susceptible of a generous zeal for his friend.

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Besides, though, from a regard to the honour and interest of our country, it is to be wished that dissenters might be admitted to all civil offices of honour and trust, in common with others, their fellow-subjects, who have no better title to them in other respects: yet a person, who should consult the interest of the dissenters only, as a body of men who separate themselves from a principle of *religion*, without regard to the interest of the community at large, might, perhaps, hesitate about taking any steps to procure an enlargement of their privileges. Professing a religion which inculcates upon us that we are *not of this world*, but only in a course of discipline, to train us up for a better, it is worth considering, whether a situation, in which more scope will be given to ambition, and other passions, the tendency of which is to attach us to this world, is to be wished for by us. Should not a christian, as such (though he should, by no means, secrete himself from society, or decline any opportunity of serving his friend, or his country, when divine Providence seems to call him out to the sphere of active life) be content to pass unmolested in the private walks of life, rejoicing, as his master did, in doing all kind offices to his fellow creatures, without

without aspiring at civil power, and those honorary distinctions, with which the hearts of the men of this world are so much captivated, and, very often, so fatally insnared.

As our Lord warned his disciples, that the world would love its own, and would hate them, because they were not of the world; and that he who would follow him, must *take up his cross* to do it; is it not, *ceteris paribus*, more probable, that we are these disciples, when we suffer some degree of persecution, and are rather frowned upon by the powers of this world, than if we have free access to all the emoluments of it? Certainly, such a situation is far more favourable to our gaining that superiority to the world, which is required of all christians, whatever be their station in it. We know that *if persecution should arise, on account of the word*, we must be ready to forsake houses, lands, relations, and all the endearments of life, rather than make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience; and that, in those trying times, if we deny Christ, he will also deny us. Then he that would save his life, shall lose it, and he only that is willing to lose his life, shall save it to life eternal. This, christians,

is the tenure on which we hold all the blessings of the gospel.

Now, if this be the temper to which we are to be formed, whether persecution should actually arise; or not, what kind of a situation should we (from the knowledge we have of human nature) prescribe, as the most favourable for the purpose? Certainly, not one in which we should have nothing to bear or to suffer, and where every thing should be just as we could wish it. A mind accustomed to this treatment would be ill prepared for encountering the various hardships of the christian warfare, in a time of persecution. In a situation in every respect favourable to the pursuits and enjoyments of this life, it would not be easy for a man to attain to any thing like a satisfactory conviction, that he had the proper temper and disposition of a christian. Habits of mind are not acquired by *putting cases* (which, however, persons would little think of doing, when the cases were not likely to occur) but by actual experience and feeling. A habit of caution can never be given to a child by admonition only. It is by frequent hurts that he learns to take care of himself. So likewise courage

rage and fortitude are acquired by being frequently exposed to pains and hardships, exerting our powers, and feeling the benefit of such exertion.

All these things duly considered, a man who entertains the truly enlarged sentiments of christianity, and is sensible how momentary and insignificant are all the things of this world, in comparison with those of a future, will, in proportion to the influence of these views, be less impatient of the difficulties and restraints he may lie under in a civil capacity. He will more easily acquiesce in a situation not perfectly eligible, when he is prepared even to bear the greatest sufferings that can befall him in this life with christian fortitude, patience, and resignation, at the same time that the benevolence of his heart is always ready to take the form of the most generous patriotism, whenever there occurs a clear, and great cause to exert it. If a true christian be conscious that he is engaged in a good cause, he, of all men, has the least reason to fear *what man can do unto him*, and therefore he is more to be depended upon, in any critical emergence, than any other person whatever.

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A dissenter then, who is so *upon principle*, who has, consequently, the justest notions of the nature and importance of civil and religious liberty; who is, on many accounts, thoroughly sensible of the blessings of a mild and equal government, and, therefore, heartily attached to the interest of that constitution which allows him the rights which he values so highly; whose mind is prepared to bear irremediable hardships with patience, but whose active courage, in cases in which the great interests of his country call him to exert himself, may be depended upon, is a very valuable member of civil society. Such a man will scorn the mean arts of court intrigue. If he can gain his laudable ends, and be admitted to his natural rights, as a loyal British subject, by fair and open means, he will not despise it; but he will rather continue to suffer unjustly, than prostitute his interest to a corrupt, profligate, and oppressive administration.

SECTION III.

SOME of you, my brethren, I am afraid, are discouraged, and are ready to quit the dissenting interest, because it is *expensive* to you. You think it hard to be taxed by the government very high, and contrary to all principles of equity, to maintain the ecclesiastical establishment of the country, and at the same time raise salaries for the maintenance of your own ministers, besides being frequently called upon to contribute towards building meeting houses, houses for ministers, funds for the education of ministers, for the relief of their widows, &c. &c. &c. I own that all these things are incident to you as dissenters, they are necessarily expensive, and, I think the times are such, that these necessary expences must rather increase than diminish. But this is not a thing to be complained of, if the cause be worth supporting at the expence; and I hope enough has been said already, to put that beyond a doubt.

I trust there are none among us of so sordid a disposition, as to think that nothing is worth
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money, but money itself, or such things as may be bought with it, in the ordinary method of traffic. The gift of God, said St. Peter to Simon Magus, is not to be purchased with money; but it was a thing of unspeakably more value. And, certainly, useful truth of all kinds, and especially religious truth, though not to be bought with money, is of infinitely more value than money; and to be sparing of money, in a cause in which religion and truth may be promoted, is the most contemptible parsimony. Liberty, also, together with the other great natural rights of mankind, is to be ranked in the same class. They are things in which price has no concern, but they are *above all price*; and in a cause in which they are so clearly concerned, no man of a generous mind will ever repent of his expences, though he be not able to demonstrate what he has gained, by the method of *profit and loss*, in his books of account. You may not be so rich after such expences; but yourselves, and your posterity, may be more wise, free, and happy.

Consider, my brethren, in what manner christianity operated upon the minds of men when it was first promulgated. Of so little value did the primitive christians think the things of this world,

world, in comparison of the great cause of christianity, that, without any command from God, they made no difficulty of throwing every thing they had into a common stock, to be applied to the advantage of the common cause, at the discretion of certain stewards, chosen by themselves for that purpose. They were men so detached from this world, and had their views so much fixed upon another, that they thought the best use they could make of all their possessions here, was to make them subservient to their interest hereafter. They set no bounds to the application of this rule, concerning *the true use of riches*. They gave *all they had*, and kept nothing back. And did the circumstances of christianity at present require it, we should not deserve the name of christians, if we hesitated a moment about doing the same. But tho' there be no occasion to do what they did, let us follow the same rule. They did what their times required; let us do what our times require, and do it without grudging. You can never dispose of your wealth in a manner that will give more satisfaction to a mind that sees things in their true light, than by making it subservient to the interests of truth, liberty, and genuine christi-

anity; and this, I believe, is the cause I am pleading, when I plead that of the protestant dissenting interest in England and Ireland.

I do not, however, suppose that the circumstances the dissenting interest is in at present, by any means require, that you should materially injure your fortunes, or your families, in its support. It will be abundantly sufficient, if your expences on this head only come near those you actually do make on other accounts, which yourselves, if you were asked, would acknowledge to be of less use; and *so far* the dissenting interest has a just claim upon you; and you are debtors to the cause of truth and liberty, if you have hitherto done less. The obligation to contribute in cases of this nature, is, by no means, the less, because it can never be defined what particular sum, or what proportion of your fortune, you ought to expend. In this respect, no person has a right to tax you, nor may you be able to fix any exact bounds to yourselves. It is the same in cases of common charity, and a variety of other things, of which instances occur every day, which are all of *unquestionable*, tho' of indefinite, and various obligation; and with respect to which, the generous will

will act generously, and the mean-spirited will, like themselves, act meanly.

It may assist you to feel, and act with propriety upon this occasion, to consider what your heroic ancestors did and suffered in the same cause, and how much you owe to their liberality. How many hundreds and thousands of the old puritans, men of *whom the world was not worthy*, bore with cheerfulness the spoiling of their goods, and submitted to heavy fines and confiscations, till they were absolutely impoverished, rather than relinquish what they were persuaded was the cause of *truth and liberty*, and therefore *the cause of God*. Consider how many years they bore cruel imprisonments, under which numbers of them languished and died, in the imperious reign of queen Elizabeth, and the more oppressive reigns of the Stewarts; so that many men of opulent fortunes, who were qualified to make a figure in their native country, were glad to take refuge from the storm of persecution, on the then inhospitable coasts of *North America*, exposed to an inclement climate, and the fury of intractable savages, (but who had more compassion than the hackneyed tools of a wicked administration

at home) glad, at this risque, to procure what they thought the invaluable privilege of worshipping their maker according to the dictates of their consciences, unmolested.

Consider the glorious scene that was exhibited on the ever memorable St. Bartholomew, A. D. 1662, a scene which few countries besides England can boast of, when *two thousand* ministers did not hesitate to throw up their church preferments, many of them without any other resource, rather than violate their consciences, by complying beyond their sentiments in religious matters. And this they did, tho' many of the things imposed upon them were acknowledged to be, in themselves, matters of indifference. Of so much consequence did they justly think it, not to admit a right in any men, or body of men, whatever, of prescribing and imposing any thing, with respect to that religion, of which Christ alone is the supreme head; so as by law to make that necessary, which he left indifferent. What would they have felt, and how would they have acted, had their minds been enlightened as ours are now; and, consequently, had they been persuaded, that they were not only required to submit to the impositions of
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men in matters of religion, but to the imposition of a form of worship, which, besides containing many articles of faith, the very reverse of the most important doctrines of genuine christianity, as delivered in the New Testament, derogated from the sacred rights of the only living and true God, and was *idolatrous*.

Consider, my brethren, the vast sums your ancestors began to expend, the moment they gained a little respite from the persecution above mentioned, exhausted as they then were, in erecting places of worship, in the liberal support of their ministers, and also in the endowments they made, of lands and houses, in order to provide for the continuance of that method of worship which they approved, the benefit of which we enjoy at this day.

If you ask how they were able to supply those expences, I answer, that they thought the interest in which they were engaged, of so much consequence, that they were hardly at any other extraordinary expences. They were men who had no taste for the fashionable and expensive pleasures of the age in which they lived. From the highest to the lowest, they were men of the greatest frugality, and the most indefatigable

industry in their several employments; which, thro' the blessing of God, proved a never-failing resource for the many and large demands that were made upon them, for the common cause. For these virtues your ancestors were so greatly distinguished in those times, that tho' they were almost all of them concerned in trade, a bankrupt was not known among them for many years. When instances of this kind did happen, so strict was their church discipline, and so heinous did they consider the vices which they thought to have been instrumental in bringing mens affairs to that catastrophe, that excommunication certainly followed upon it; nor could the bankrupt be restored to church communion, till he had clearly demonstrated, that he had not been guilty of fraud, extravagance, or want of industry; but that his misfortune was the act of God;

I wish, my brethren, you would review the history of the great worthies, from whom you have the honour to be descended. Warm your hearts with the recollection of what they did and suffered, imitate their laudable industry, adopt their generous zeal, retrench, like them, the superfluous expences of a frivolous and
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luxurious age; and be liberal, as they were, in the cause of religion, liberty, and truth.

Give me leave to represent to you these circumstances, in the present state of the dissenting interest, and particularly of its ministers, which make a considerable expence absolutely necessary to support the cause, and without which that part of the interest which is most liberal, and worthy of support, must necessarily decline. The interest in which you are engaged cannot be respectable, unless your ministers be men of a liberal education, and feel themselves in a situation, in which they may freely think and act, as themselves shall judge the cause of christianity, and your interest demand. This, you must be sensible, requires not only a liberal education, but likewise a *liberal support*.

If you say that the ministers of the last age had smaller salaries than those of the present, you say what is true, but you deceive yourselves at the same time. They did not receive so much as a *fixed stipend*; but, in many cases, their families were almost wholly maintained by the bounty of their hearers. If they had children, their people made a point of providing some decent employment for them, and settling them
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in the world; and few of the congregation made a will, without considering their minister, a place of worship, or both. In short, ministers, in those days, being freed from all anxiety about the things of this world, either on their own account, or that of their families, were at liberty to give their whole attention to the proper duties of their function; and notwithstanding ministers seem to have been more dependent upon their people, there never was a time in which ministers had more influence, and when their reproofs and censures were more feared. That this was very much the case formerly, I can appeal to the memory of many persons now living, or even to what is now the fact, in some parts of the kingdom where the old customs have been religiously kept up.

At present, tho' the salaries of ministers have been considerably advanced, in comparison of what they were formerly, *occasional bounty*, to which the stated salary once bore but a small proportion, is in many places wholly withdrawn, and in general greatly diminished. Where the custom is kept up, the tenure on which it is held is, in many places, very precarious. How often has it been dropped for imaginary affronts,

affronts, and supposed instances of ingratitude and disrespect; and if once a minister happen to have no occasion for this liberality, the habit of giving is often lost, by being suspended, and has not revived in favour of the successor, tho' in ever so much want of it. Also, if a minister behave ill, and he and people part on ill terms, the persons who think themselves injured, sometimes resolve never to put it in the power of any future minister to treat them with the same ingratitude, and so take their revenge upon all who come after, though ever so grateful, modest, and deserving. At the same time not the most distant hint can, with the least regard to decorum, and without hazarding the loss of what may remain of this bounty, be given, either by the minister or his friends, that any extraordinary favour is even thought of by him.

Add to this, that the price of all necessary provisions is prodigiously advanced all over England. Moreover the taste of living is much higher than it was, so that the expences which *custom*, at least, if not nature have made necessary, in their case, are more than double of what they were in the memory of man. On this account, the largest income of any dissenting minister is
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barely a decent maintenance for a family, without a possibility of laying up any thing for the use of a widow, or children, after his death. Indeed, a genteel congregation would think themselves disgraced by the mean housekeeping dress and appearance of their minister, or his family. It is unfortunate, also, that ministers, by being invited to the tables of their richer hearers, too often acquire a taste for high living themselves, a taste which it would be ruinous to them to gratify at home.

It is acknowledged, that many ministers have contributed to bring all this upon themselves. They have made themselves despicable by their fawning and flattering to those from whom they have expected favours. They have appeared to be too much influenced by a regard to the emoluments of their office, and less faithful and disinterested in the discharge of their duty; and instances, I believe, there are, of their taking advantage of the disposition of sick and dying persons, to insinuate themselves into their favour. But, unfortunately, a just resentment of this truly despicable and unworthy conduct operates like a two edged sword. It wounds both the deserving, and the undeserving.

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The consequence of these discouragements is a circumstance, which already begins to be very alarming to the dissenting interest. Formerly, when the ministry was more reputable, persons of some rank and fortune educated their sons for it. Many of these ministers, being easy in their circumstances, took no care about their salaries, and were so far from making a gain of godliness, or even being supported by the interest, that they contributed to its support, by preaching in places, in which the salary kept dwindling, till, after they died, a minister could not be supported. Many places have been intirely shut up in this manner.

So well known are the straits to which ministers and their families have often been reduced, that few are now educated with a view to it, except young persons, who have a turn for learning, and whose parents are unable to make any other provision for them. Even persons educated in this manner are fewer every year; for it is a low way of life indeed, that will not produce more money, which is the thing that the generality of parents chiefly consider; so that it is now no easy matter to find young persons to educate

educate for the ministry, tho' it cost the parent little or nothing.

What then is likely to be the consequence of this deficiency of ministers liberally educated among the dissenters? The interest must grow less respectable, lay preachers, and persons of an enthusiastic turn of mind, and superficially instructed, will grow more numerous, or vacancies among us must be supplied from Scotland; and *how* they are supplied from this quarter, let the state of the dissenting interest in the north of England testify. What religious principles are they, that we can expect to have brought among us by men who have subscribed *the Scotch confession of faith*, and *the assembly's catechism*; besides that, in general only the very refuse of the country, and such as can get no preferment at home, can be expected to migrate into England.

The only method by which these evils can be remedied, is to make the dissenting ministry an object worth the attention of persons of a liberal education, and this is only in the power of gentlemen of fortune to do. Exert yourselves, my brethren, for this purpose. Revive the zeal of your ancestors, and dispose of your superfluous
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wealth in this *good old cause*. Behave towards your ministers, not with a superstitious reverence, but with that respect which a regard to virtue, learning, and religion ought to enforce. Treat them with generosity, and exact no servile compliances from them; but consider them as your superiors with respect to office, whatever your rank in life may be, your equals as men and gentlemen, and your inferiors in nothing but what will always make fools and knaves superior to men of sense and virtue. There are many congregations of dissenters, which fully answer this description, nay which exceed whatever can be reasonably expected of them; but it must be acknowledged, there are more of these, that are of the old puritanical stamp, than of the free-thinking and liberal among us.

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SECTION IV.

WITH the same freedom with which I have treated the *laity* among us, I would subjoin a word of advice to the *ministers*. Propriety of conduct on your side will go a great way towards replacing your order in that respectable situation, in which I most heartily wish to see it. Imbibe the spirit of your religion and of your office. Without adopting all the austerity of your predecessors, whose minds were made more severe by the hardships they had suffered, refrain from giving into the levities of the age in which we live. Let it be manifest that you are no lovers of what is called pleasure, or given to dissipation; that you are no slaves to your appetite, and have nothing of conceit, or vanity, with respect to your persons, your dress, or your talents. Avoid also all expensive shew in furniture or ornaments of every kind.

This caution against giving into an excessive love of pleasure, and indulging a turn for gaiety and dissipation, which are so prevalent in the
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present age, is strongly enforced by a regard to your particular situation, as persons who pretend to *think* more freely than others. You are not unacquainted, that the popular cry against you is, that you *do* more freely too, and are less scrupulous with respect to propriety, decency, and moral strictness of behaviour; and the suspicion is not, altogether, without foundation. Such is the nature of man, that we are prone to run into extremes; so that, having once called in question the principles of our ancestors, we are too apt to think them to have been absurd and wrong in every thing. Indeed a great deal of their external strictness was certainly superstitious, and some of the good customs they kept up were, with respect to them, built on false principles. These, therefore, being thrown down, whatever rested upon them, how good soever in itself, falls with them.

But, being aware of this, let us, my brethren, be upon our guard against the licentiousness of reformation. Let us not be precipitate, but endeavour to separate the wheat from the chaff; and, before we absolutely reject any thing, let us consider whether other, and better reasons

may not be given for it, than those by which it has been enforced upon us. Having discarded every thing of superstition, and what is false and useless in religion, let us be the more zealous in the observance of what appears, upon examination, to be genuine and useful.

I cannot help thinking that, in this case, the apostolic example, *to become all things to all men*; and his advice about the conduct of those who are strong towards those who are weak, should engage us to a conformity, at least for a time, in every thing that is innocent, to the prejudices of others. This we shall certainly do, if we mean to give to others a favourable opinion of ourselves, and of our principles, if we have any thoughts of winning upon them, and do not intend to exasperate them against us, and to induce them, from the mere spirit of opposition, to persist in obstinately holding their errors and prejudices.

Do not fail to inculcate these considerations upon the *laity*, whose situation and circumstances lay them under less restraint than yourselves, and whose freedom, from the prejudices of their ancestors is, in many cases, by no means to be placed to the account of a love of truth, or can
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be called the result of mature and serious examination. Many of them laugh at the strict observance of the sabbath, and regularity in the times of public and private devotion, as superstition, and not necessarily connected with moral conduct. They sneer at the doctrines of a trinity in unity, original sin, predestination, and atonement, &c. because, at first view, they are mysterious and unintelligible; but, from the same superficial turn of mind, they neglect the Lord's supper, discard family prayer, never catechize their children, and are apt to neglect devotion in all its forms. Because they think they need not *mortify*, they will not so much as *restrain* their appetites; as if to avoid the imputation of being a *round head*, it was necessary to become a *cavalier*.

Too many of these modern freethinkers, having indulged themselves, without reserve, in laughing at every thing they cannot comprehend, take into their heads to be offended at the *Jewish religion*; they make no scruple to ridicule the divine mission and miracles of Moses; and after this it will not be wondered at, that they often reject the christian revelation also. To trace this fatal *unthinking* progress a little fur-

ther, still they will pretend to expect a future state of rewards and punishments, from the principles of the light of nature; but when once they have advanced thus far in infidelity, they are generally soon content to rank themselves with the beasts that perish. When persons have, in this manner, thrown off all regard to religion, can it be supposed they can have any strong attachment to the *dissenting interest*? Some of them may continue to rank among us, from a regard to the principles of liberty, and other political considerations; but when religion makes no part of the tie, it may be expected in general, that the laity will be governed by their own secular interest; and if, through the influence of the same causes, a minister have become an unbeliever in the religion he professes to teach, I do not see why he may not, with equal consistency, officiate in the church of England, the church of Rome, or among the Mohammedans, as among the dissenters.

This however is too often the progress of infidelity with the thoughtless and half thinking laity; and to keep them in a proper medium, must be owned to be of great importance, and a matter of great difficulty. I

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know of nothing that is so likely to be effectual for this purpose, as the prudent conduct, and true moderation of ministers. Let it appear, by the whole of your behaviour, that you are *serious christians*, and not ashamed of any practices which are of real use to form a christian and devout temper. Let it be seen, that the principles of christianity have a real and happy effect upon your hearts and lives, and that, by virtue of a practical faith in its great principles, you are possessed of an uniform chearfulness of mind, are enabled to live in a firm confidence in divine providence, under all the events of life, and are prepared to die with composure and good hope. Carefully avoid insulting or ridiculing those who differ from you in opinion, especially those who retain the principles you yourselves once held. This shows as much bigotry and want of real candour as their censoriousness, and readiness to pass sentence of damnation upon you. Nay, it may be said, in excuse for their zeal in condemning your opinions, that they consider them as inconsistent with salvation; whereas you do not pretend that their opinions are dangerous to them. There may, therefore,

be the sincerest friendship in their anger, but there is wanton cruelty in your laughter.

Let it appear that the principal object of your attention is the proper duty of your profession, and let no taste you may have for any of the polite arts, as music, painting, or poetry, nor a capacity for the improvements in science, engage you to make them more than an *amusement* to you, or, at the most, any more than an object of secondary consideration. Let not even the study of speculative theology prevent your applying yourself chiefly to the advancement of virtue among your hearers. Let your conduct demonstrate, that you consider one soul reclaimed from vicious habits, or even one person's mind confirmed in any good resolution, as a greater acquisition to you, than the detection of any speculative error, the illustration of any known truth, or the discovery of any new ones.

With respect to your general manner of behaviour, let not a sense of your inferiority to your hearers, in point of fortune, lead you into any mean and servile compliances with their foibles and opinions; nor, on the other hand, let a sense of the dignity of your office, or your advantage in point of sense and learning, betray
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you into pride, arrogance, and an overbearing decisive manner in conversation, which cannot fail to give offence. Study human nature and mankind, but with no other view than to do them good. Endeavour to be cheerful, polite, (as far as that term conveys the idea of a reasonable desire to please) and free from affectation. Take no pains to conceal any natural peculiarity of character, that is innocent in itself, and not offensive to others; for, above all things, simplicity of character, and the greatest freedom from artifice and disguise, becomes the teachers of the religion of Jesus Christ.

Let it appear that, in consequence of being much conversant with subjects suited to your profession, you have acquired a superiority of mind to this world, and all the things of it; that you are chiefly solicitous about the faithful and impartial discharge of your duty, which is to inculcate upon them the same christian temper and conduct, of which you exhibit an example in yourselves; and let it appear, that this consciousness of doing your duty, gives you a practical and habitual reliance on the providence of God, for the supply of your wants, and the care of your families after you are dead.

If, however, you have a fair opportunity of making provisions for futurity, by no means neglect to do it; and I sincerely wish that every student for the christian ministry among the dissenters would, in the course of his education, give attention to those branches of knowledge, by which he might be of use to society, independent of his profession as a minister. This would prove a resource to him in a day of adversity, and, in the mean time, would make him be regarded by his people with more of that respect, which is always paid to persons that are independent of them.

SECTION V.

IT is possible that some of those who are called *rational dissenters* may be discouraged by the smallness of the party, and the seemingly declining state of the interest. But this is an objection that will hardly bear to be avowed, and can only have weight with weak minds. The cause of truth and liberty can never cease to be respectable, whether its advocates be few or many. Rather, if the cause be just and honourable, the smaller is the party that support it, the fewer there are to share that honour with us. It can never be matter of praise to any man to join a multitude, but to be singular in a good thing is the greatest praise. It shows a power of discernment, and fortitude of mind, not to be overborne by those unworthy motives, which are always on the side of the majority, whether their cause be good or bad.

That there are few dissenters of exceeding large fortunes, especially in the country, is very true; but it may be accounted for, in a manner that is far from reflecting any dishonour on the interest.

interest. Many dissenters have been born to great fortunes, and many others have themselves acquired large fortunes by trade; but when this has been the case, as the possession of wealth naturally tends to make men more worldly minded, and exposes them more to the influence of worldly views; and as men naturally aspire to rank with their superiors, rather than their inferiors in fortune, they have not been able to find proper persons to associate with, except in the church; and the consequence of these connections, with such men, is evident. Many also have left the dissenters after marrying into families that go to church. But these are motives entirely foreign to the merits of the cause, and therefore will never have the least influence with men of reason and religion. Let a number of persons be produced who will gravely say, they left the dissenting interest, and went to the established church, from real conviction of mind, and after mature consideration; and if even their new acquaintance believe them, this objection shall be considered again.

It will be said the dissenting *ministers*, and especially those who are called *free* in their sentiments, frequently conform to the church of England. It

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is acknowledged; but, at the same time, it is apprehended, that when the members of the establishment consider all the circumstances attending these *conversions*, they will see little to boast of in the acquisition. It is well known that many of them have been men of profligate lives, or despicable characters, who were dismissed with ignominy from the service of the dissenters; others there is reason enough to suppose, found nothing among the dissenters suited to their ambitious views. It may perhaps be true, that some could not get a decent maintenance by their labours; however the class of dissenters to which they are acknowledged to have belonged (*viz.* those who in their sentiments differ the most from the principles of the church of England) is a sufficient indication of *what kind* must have been the motives of their conformity. For as it can never be pretended that they have changed their sentiments concerning those articles, which the rational part of the dissenters object to the most in the church of England, the motive could not be *serious conviction*; but their subscription to articles they do not believe, but continue to preach against, and even laugh at, must either have been a subscription

scription to them as *articles of peace*, or as far as they are agreeable to the scriptures, or with some other of these miserable equivocations, the futility of which has been so clearly exposed by the author of the Confessional. If, however, any dissenting minister has really, from full conviction of mind, *ex animo*, subscribed his assent and consent to all, and every of the thirty nine articles of the church of England, and also to all, and every thing else that a clergyman is required to subscribe, (the possibility of which I do not absolutely deny) I think the loss is by no means to be regretted. Let the bigots to the church set a high value upon him, he is *rara avis in terris, nigroque similima cygno*.

Persons who are descended of members of the church of England, who are educated by clergymen, who are introduced into the ministry at an English university, where *theology*, if I be rightly informed, makes no part of their study, and where it is the custom to subscribe at a time of life, when it cannot be supposed they have reflected on the nature of the action; to see that they do no more than all their friends and acquaintance do, and continue to do, without the least scruple; and who, perhaps, never
heard

heard any objection made to it, are to be considered in a very different light from dissenting ministers, who generally study theological subjects with great care; also, in consequence of hearing the business of subscription frequently discussed, cannot but have reflected on the nature of solemnly subscribing to what they do not believe, and of repeating, in acts of divine worship, what their consciences disclaim. Every allowance may reasonably be made for the former; but, I own, that I can make no apology for the latter, except such an apology as may be made for sacrificing, in any other case, the sacred rights of conscience to some other consideration.

I cannot help considering the clergy of the *church of Scotland* as more criminal in the article of subscription than the clergy of the church of England; because the course of their studies necessarily brings the subject more frequently in their view. Indeed, with respect to all matter of theology, the minds of the Scotch ministers are certainly, of late years, much more enlightened, and yet their practice is not more reformed. Numbers of the young ministers avow their disbelief of the Scotch confession of faith,

faith, &c. they see the business of subscription to it in its just and odious light, they cannot help feeling, or forbear complaining of the imposition; and yet I cannot say that I ever heard of an instance of any of these *bold freethinkers*, refusing to subscribe, and for so paltry an advantage as a Scotch living. I call it *paltry* when I consider the *price* that is paid for it; as a salary for a minister, I think it sufficient, and respectable. But certainly it argues a baser soul in a man, to sacrifice his conscience for a *small* than for a *great* consideration.

Upon the whole, when the reasons of the small number of dissenters are such as have been represented above, their small number is far from being a matter of reflection upon them, or what they need to be ashamed of. Besides, there are many important ends which the existence of the dissenting interest answers, even with respect to the established church itself, which make it well worth supporting. It necessarily operates as a check upon the clergy, and prevents them from sinking into that indolence, luxury, ignorance, and arrogance, to which, as men, with little or no controul, they would otherwise be more subject. Their literary
pride

pride must be kept within bounds by seeing, among the dissenters, men equal to themselves in genius, application to study, and an acquaintance with all the branches of useful science. This circumstance cannot fail also to rouse a laudable emulation, which will be of unspeakable advantage to the interests, both of polite literature, and of real knowledge of all kinds. And without a dissenting interest of some kind, there would hardly be a possibility of any *reformation in the church*, an event which the wisest and best among the clergy earnestly wish, and are labouring to bring about. Light always breaks out by degrees, and it is only from seeing a variety of *experiments*, as they may be called, of reformation, that the nation in general can be able to judge what are real improvements, and select such as will best suit themselves.

If, therefore, there be any, who are friends of the church of England, on any other account than the prospect of providing for some of their relations and dependents by its emoluments, they cannot shew a truer regard to it, than by favouring the dissenting interest, because, whatever is decent and respectable in the church is, in some measure, owing to the dissenters. So long as
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the dissenting interest is a nursery for men of liberal and enlarged minds, who make it their study to restore christianity to its primitive simplicity, and many such it can boast at present, so long as it is the cause of civil and religious liberty, which it can never cease to be; and so long as it is a check upon the disorders into which the established clergy would otherwise sink, which also it can never cease to be, it must appear a truly respectable interest, in the eyes of all men who are capable of entertaining just and generous views of things, though it be ever so inconsiderable with respect to numbers.

As to the number of dissenters in England, it must be considered, that, notwithstanding the seeming declension of what we call the rational part of the dissenters, there is perhaps rather an increase than a decrease upon the whole. Those who are called independents, retain all the zeal of the old puritans; and though several of their societies *are* become daily what we call more free in their sentiments, they receive daily recruits from the *methodists*; and many very numerous societies of independents have been formed intirely out of that body. Even these new made dissenters will, by degrees, necessarily
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come to think freely, and supply the places of those rational, but lukewarm dissenters, who are daily absorbed either in the church or in irreligion; and thus may the *circulation*, at least, be kept up.

I cannot help considering the methodists as raised up by divine providence, at a most seasonable juncture, as a barrier against the encroachments of ecclesiastical tyranny, in the declension of the old dissenting interest. For whatever be the real views of their leaders, one great point, in favour of the dissenting interest, is gained with all the methodists; which is, that tho' they communicate with the church of England, they are no longer attached to the hierarchy as such. That blind and bigotted attachment, which is the great hold that the clergy have on the minds of the common people, is broken, the moment they can chuse to worship God without the walls of the parish church, and without the use of the common prayer book. Their minds are, from that time, at liberty to consider the expediency of different forms of worship, and to adopt that to which their judgment shall give the preference; and as public worship is universally conducted among them, in the same man-

ner as among the dissenters, they are already in the way to us, from the established church. When such a spirit of reformation is raised, it will not be in the power of those who have the most influence among them to say, *Hitherto shall it go and no farther*. It is not improbable, that a great revolution may take place in their affairs, when the heads of two or three of their present leaders shall be laid in the grave.

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SECTION VI.

I AM aware of another circumstance, which may make the dissenting interest appear despicable in the eyes of some ; this, I shall not conceal, but consider, and reply to the objection that arises from it. We are split into such a number of *sects* and parties, (some of which discover a mean, contracted, and illiberal spirit, treating their antagonists with hatred and abhorrence, while others treat theirs with a supercilious contempt) that some persons may be ashamed of having any thing to do with us. The charge is, in a great measure, true ; but this divided state of the dissenting interest is inseparable from the freedom we all profess and enjoy, and, consequently, from the great good that evidently arises from the exercise of that freedom.

Besides, it is wrong to consider the dissenters as *one body*. They have nothing necessarily in common, but their claim to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences ; and those consciences, being the consciences of different men, dictate very different things ; and no person is responsible for more than his own

sentiments and conduct. I cannot but say, however, that I heartily wish all the sects of dissenters would consider, that, in consequence of their agreement in this one circumstance, concerning their natural right to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences, they have great interests in common; and would for this reason entertain less animosity against one another on account of the things in which they differ.

Though it happen, that in the town in which you live, there be no societies of dissenters that you can approve of, it can hardly happen, that there is none; but what, if you consider seriously, you may more conscientiously join with, than with the church of England. If we take in every thing relating to doctrine, discipline, and method of worship, I think there is no sect or denomination among us that is not nearer the standard of the gospel than the established church; so that even in those circumstances, you will be a dissenter, if reason, and not passion, or prejudice, be your guide.

If when you reside for any time in the country, you chuse to go to church rather than to the dissenting meeting-house, because the dissenters hap-

happen to make no great figure in the place; if you feel any thing like *shame*, upon seeing the external meanness of the interest, and secretly wish to have your connections with it concealed; conclude, that the spirit of this world has got too much hold of you, and that religious motives have lost their influence. If this be your general practice (and I wish I could say it was not so with many of the more opulent among us) you are but half a dissenter, and a few more worldly considerations would throw you intirely into the church of England, or into any church upon earth. With this temper of mind you would, in primitive times, have been ashamed of *christianity* itself, and have joined the more fashionable and pompous heathen worship. But consider what our Lord says, with a view to all such circumstances as these, *Who soever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, of him also shall the son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his father with his holy angels.* General, alas! and fatal is the influence of fashion in what it ought to have the least concern with, matters of *religion*. Members of the reformed churches on the continent, who are generally presbyterians, seldom scruple to join the episcopal church of England,

England, evidently for no other reason, than because it is the most illustrious of the protestant churches in the island; and because, in this connection, they are more in the way of being taken notice of by persons of figure and distinction, and thereby advancing themselves in life. Rapin, the historian, acknowledges himself to be a presbyterian, but at the same time, avows his constant communion with the church of England when he resided here.

If you be an *unitarian*, and, in other respects, one of those who are called the free-thinking party among the dissenters; and if there be no dissenting place of worship that you can conveniently attend, except one belonging to those who are of the rigid independent party; and if you think that, in joining with them, you countenance many antichristian errors; still, you should consider that, in going to the established church, you not only countenance the very same *antichristian errors*, but an *antichristian hierarchy* also, and a number of other abuses, which can never subsist among any sect of dissenters whatever. And it appears to me, that every man is under an obligation to support the publick worship of God, in that manner which
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he most approves upon the whole, notwithstanding it may contain many things which he cannot approve.

If you be of the other party of dissenters, I need say nothing to persuade you to adhere to the interest. Tho' you are much nearer to the established church than any other party of dissenters, you justly consider the points in which you do differ from it, to be of so much importance, that you will maintain the separation in the lowest state possible, rather than give it up intirely.

Besides, as you lay less stress upon a learned ministry, a number of you so small as not to be able to support a regular minister, can meet together, and *edify one another*, after the manner of the primitive church; which I mention not with ridicule, but with real approbation. Christianity may, surely, exist without the aid of human learning, and the notion of the validity of the administration of christian ordinances, depending upon any particular order of men, who must subsist wholly by the ministry, is, I think, exploded by us all.

Divisions among dissenters cannot afford any better foundation for an objection to the dissenting

senting interest, than divisions among christians in general afford for an objection to christianity itself: Indeed this circumstance cannot supply a just and reasonable objection to any scheme of religion, for there are sects and parties in them all.

To conclude, I do not know that I have concealed any thing relating to the dissenting interest, that can afford any person a pretence for deserting it; and recommending what I have said in reply to the various objections to it, and concerning the difficulties and discouragements attending it, with what I have further advanced in favour of it, to your deliberate and candid attention.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your very humble Servant,

A DISSENTER.